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## Some unpublished correspondence on the apparent nesting of ospreys on Loch Lomondside in the 1880s

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Until now, it has been assumed that the last date for ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* breeding on Loch Lomondside in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was 1829, when the pair which annually built their nest on the ruined castle of Inchgalbraith was deliberately destroyed in the supposed interest of game fish preservation (Mitchell, 1980). However, the contents of some 100 year old plus correspondence that has recently come into my possession (courtesy of J.A. Lumsden) strongly suggest that ospreys subsequently bred at other Lomondside localities in the early to mid 1880s.

In a communication from John A. Harvie Brown (then the leading authority on the vertebrate fauna of Scotland) to local naturalist James Lumsden of Arden dated 30 November 1905, Harvie Brown mentions that a fisherman by the name of James Davidson had passed on information to the effect that ospreys had been seen on Loch Lomond in the summer of 1881 or 1882. Anxious that any additional historical data should not be lost, Harvie Brown urged James Lumsden to make enquiries about any further sightings of ospreys around those years. Despite the length of time that had elapsed, Lumsden was fortunate in being able to make contact with Walter McDiarmid, a professional boatman at Luss who made a seasonal living from taking out visiting anglers including the said James Davidson to the best fishing spots on the loch.

Replying to James Lumsden in a letter postmarked 5 December 1905, McDiarmid began by saying he had first noticed two large 'hawks' which he thought might be ospreys hovering above the waters of Loch Lomond in 1880. Over the next couple of summers (when his client Davidson was able to positively identify the birds for him), a pair was regularly observed in the vicinity of Torrinch, an oak and conifer-clad island well out into the loch. He then went on to relate how from 1883 the ospreys took up new quarters at Ross Point near Salloch on the eastern shore. For a year or two they continued to be seen in the general vicinity of the Ross Point until the oak coppice there was harvested [Note: records contained in the Montrose Estate papers confirm that the cutting of the oak coppice and remaining mature trees in this particular

woodland compartment was completed in 1885 (Tittensor, 1970)]. Significantly, McDiarmid added that he had witnessed woodcutters having returned from the Ross Point to Luss had with them two birds which he took to be young ospreys from the nest. After this, he never saw the parent birds on Loch Lomondside again.

Despite the continuing background of persecution by game preservers and attention from trophy hunters, a few pairs from Scotland's original population of ospreys did manage to survive into the opening years of the 20th century, the last confirmed nesting attempt in the country taking place at Loch Loyne in Inverness-shire in 1916 (Sandeman, 1957).

### REFERENCES

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